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British agents in Afghanistan (1879)

Owen Tudor Burne Sir

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BRITISH AGENTS
IN
AFGHANISTAN.

IN a letter addressed to the "Times," on the 23rd of November last, the Duke of Argyll made the following statement:—

"General assurances were given to Shere Ali (in 1869) that from time to time we should give him such assistance and support as the circumstances of the case might seem, in our judgment, to justify and require.

"It may well be asked if this was enough to satisfy the Ameer as a substitute for all the demands he had made—for the treaty offensive and defensive, for the guarantee against domestic enemies, for the assurance of his succession, for the annual subsidy? No. There was one more concession which Lord Mayo made, and made willingly. He promised to the Ameer 'that no European officers would be placed as Residents in his cities.'

"The stress which was laid upon this at the Umballa conferences, and the high place given to it among the engagements to which they led, are a sufficient indication of the value which attached to it in the feelings and the opinions of the Ameer." . . .

"On the one side he had the Indian Government demanding the surrender of an immunity from the interference of British officers, on which he set the highest value, and which had been solemnly guaranteed to him by the promise of a Viceroy whom he had loved and trusted. On the other side he had the Russians, whose interference he must dislike quite as much."

The Duke of Argyll repeats this general statement with characteristic ability in a book entitled "The Eastern Question,"* published in London last week. In this book he throws doubt upon certain evidence given by myself, Major Grey, and others, to the effect that the Ameer Shere Ali Khan was, in 1869,† willing to "consider the subject of British Agencies in Afghanistan, had he received encouragement to enter officially into the subject, and had his expectations of being granted a new treaty been responded to."

Whilst assuming, however, that Shere Ali obtained from Lord Mayo a solemn pledge that "no European officers should be placed as Residents in his cities,"

* "The Eastern Question, from the Treaty of Paris, 1856, to the Treaty of Berlin, 1878, and to the second Afghan War." By the Duke of Argyll. Strahan & Co., 1879.

† Colonel Burne's Note, 24 April 1877, p. 174, Afghanistan, No. 1.

the Duke of Argyll bears testimony* to the fact that, in the early part of 1869, on first assuming the Vice-royalty, Lord Mayo, on his part, recognised, the *utility* of having an European official at Cabul, but considered that the British Government could, "without sending, *at present*, any European official to Cabul, exercise sufficient influence over him (Shere Ali) to keep him on the most amicable terms with us."† His Grace also shows, correctly enough, that Lord Mayo was at that time opposed to our taking "any direct part in the internal affairs of Afghanistan;" and that he did not *then* want any "Resident at Cabul, or political influence in his (Shere Ali's) kingdom," although he fully appreciated the value of "obtaining accurate information as to the events that occur in Central Asia."

In deducing from these facts that Lord Mayo recognised that "one of the great advantages to be derived from the approaching conference would be the opportunity it would afford him of satisfying the Ameer that we did not want to press any Residents upon him,"‡ the Duke of Argyll falls into error. Equally so when he states, with emphasis, that there was "one more concession which Lord Mayo made, and made willingly—he promised to the Ameer 'that no European officers should be placed as Residents in his cities.'"

* "The Eastern Question," vol. ii. p. 253.

† *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 256, 257.

‡ *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 264.

There is some foundation, I readily admit, for the latter inference in the terms of Lord Mayo's private letter to the Duke, dated 3rd June 1869, quoted by His Grace, as follows:—"The only pledges (to the Ameer) given were: that we would not interfere in his affairs; that we would support his independence; that we would not force European officers or Residents upon him *against his wish*."* I am prepared to show, however, that the Viceroy could not have intended to give to the words thus quoted the full meaning attached to them by the Duke of Argyll, or have supposed that any such pledge, if given, could be binding on all future Governments for all time under all circumstances.

To understand the question fully, it is necessary for a moment to go back to the transactions of 1857, viz. the negotiations leading up to the agreement of that year between Shere Ali's father and Lord Canning's Government, negotiations which were carefully studied by Shere Ali, along with those of an earlier date, before reaching British territory to attend the Umballa durbar. This agreement, concluded (on the outbreak of the Anglo-Persian war) between the Governor-General of India and Dost Mahomed, made provision for a large monthly subsidy to the Ameer during the continuance of the war, and for the temporary location of British officers with suitable establishments at Cabul, Candahar, and Balkh. These officers were to "keep their own Government

* "The Eastern Question," vol. ii. p. 274.

informed of all affairs," and to watch the disbursement of the subsidy; they were not to interfere in any way "in the internal administration of the country."

In the various conferences between the Punjab and Afghan authorities, in connection with this agreement, it became apparent that the presence of British officers in Afghanistan was not so unpalatable to the Afghans as had been anticipated, although an influential party, including Dost Mahomed himself, had so strong an objection to their location at the *capital itself* that the clause of the agreement, so far as it affected Cabul, remained a dead letter.

The following passages from some portions of the correspondence of that period will show the general feeling of the Afghans of 1857 on this subject.

On the 7th of January, 1857, Mr. Lawrence addressed Lord Canning's Government as follows :—*

"Hafizjeet on this asked whether it was our purpose to send British officers to Afghanistan. It was stated that, provided Government consented to assist the Ameer, it would be a condition that such officers should be deputed, and receive the countenance and support of His Highness. But that they would exercise no authority nor any command. Their duty would be to attend the Ameer, or any of his sons

* No. 23 A., 7 January 1847, p. 68. Epitome of Cabul Correspondence, published in Lahore Government Press. 1863.

† "Hafizjee, son of the Mir Waiz, one of the most influential men in the kingdom, whose sanctity is so great and popular (from uniting the Sayyad and Sunni in one) that it is supposed his disciples in Cabul and the Kohistan could give away the throne." (Colonel Edwardes, p. 53, *ibid.*)

whom he might entrust with the charge of a distinct portion of the Afghan force, and to give advice when required, and to obtain all the information which our Government might require, for which the Ameer would be bound to afford every facility. It was distinctly explained that they would neither interfere in the administration, nor instruct nor pay the troops. To this the Ameer and Sirdars expressed their assent, and, indeed, appeared as if they perceived the reasonableness of the arrangement. It was a point on which some difficulty had been anticipated ; but the readiness with which it was agreed to was remarkable."

He again wrote on the 15th of January, 1857 :—*

" It may be expedient here to observe that so far from the Afghan Chiefs raising objection, or in any way indicating an unwillingness to see British officers in Cabul, they had actually shown by their remarks that they were prepared to allow our officers to interfere in a manner much more decided than was contemplated. Thus, while the Chief Commissioner was explaining to the Chiefs the particular duties which Government required of our officers, Hafizjee interrupted his remarks by saying, ' they ' (the officers) ' can give the Ameer advice, they can instruct and drill the troops.' There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Ameer and his Sirdars were quite prepared for the presence of our officers, in the event of any subsidy being allowed ; at the same time, it is now equally clear that such an arrangement is distasteful

* No. 48 A., 15 January 1857, p. 75, *ibid.*

to the Afghans. The truth probably is, that the Ameer, though fully aware that the presence of English officers would compromise him with the bigoted party of his countrymen, considered the sacrifice well worth making to obtain the large pecuniary aid in his hour of need. From these discussions it was obvious that the Sirdars were not at all unwilling, and perhaps well pleased to have British officers at Candahar, but not to see them at Cabul."

A few days later he again wrote, confirming this statement. He said :—*

" After expressing the Ameer's general approval of the articles, they (the Sirdars) said the Ameer held the same opinions that they themselves had offered yesterday, as to the propriety of stationing such British officers, as may be deputed, at Candahar and not at Cabul. His Highness believed that much good would accrue from their presence on the Candahar frontier ; that the Afghan generals would get good advice from them ; that the Persians would see that the English were heartily with the Afghans ; and that these advantages would be readily understood and appreciated by the Afghans themselves. But that at Cabul no such palpable advantage would accrue, and the common people would think when they saw Europeans at the capital that the old days of Shah Shuja were come again. To this the Chief Commissioner replied that there was much force in what the Ameer and his Sirdars said ; and it was very probable that

* No. 50 A., 16 January 1857, p. 79, *ibid.*

Government might act on their advice, and begin by sending their officers to Candahar only ; but it was necessary to provide in the agreement full discretion to send British officers to any point where their presence might be required ; for instance, the war might take the direction of Balkh, and then Government would send officers to that frontier. With these explanations the point was dropped, and the fourth article left as originally drafted ; Hafizjee finally remarking that it was well to proceed gradually, and, after a little while, when the people had got accustomed to British officers at Candahar, others might come to the capital. He added that the Ameer would probably go himself to Candahar, so there would be the less necessity at present for British officers elsewhere.

“ With reference to the decided wishes of the Cabul Government, above expressed, and the apparent reasonableness of them, the Chief Commissioner recommends that for the present our European officers be deputed to Candahar alone.

“ In Clause 7 was then inserted, at the request of the Ameer, that the ‘ Vakeel ’ to be left at Cabul permanently, after the withdrawal of the British officers now deputed, was not to be a European.”

And again :—*

“ Previous to the articles being signed, they were read out in presence of the whole durbar ; after which the Chief Commissioner recapitulated those points of the arrangement which appeared most important, or

* No. 55 A., 27 January 1857, p. 81, *ibid.*

which, for the present, would not be fully carried out. These were, that three British officers would start, as soon as possible, for Candahar by the Kuram, Peiwar, and Loghar route. That no British officers for the present would go to Cabul; but that a native gentleman, probably Nawab Faujdar Khan, would be sent there by an early date; and that the Ameer should also at once appoint a Vakeel, on his own part, to reside at Peshawur."

I make these quotations as bearing, in some degree, as I have shown, on the transactions of 1869, at Umballa.

When the Ameer came to Umballa in that year to meet Lord Mayo, he had two objects at heart.* I cite these objects from the records in my possession of the only two conversations which took place between the Viceroy and Shere Ali :—

- (1.) The recognition by the British Government of his dynasty, and a guarantee of himself and his family against all comers whilst in actual possession of the throne.
- (2.) Such present assistance in money and arms as could be given.

To gain the first of these objects, there was "nothing he would not do in order to evince his gratitude and to comply with the wishes of the Indian Government in any particular."†

* First conversation between Ameer and Lord Mayo, 29 March 1869. The Ameer and Lord Mayo, of course, met on other public occasions, but not for discussion of official questions.

† *Ibid.*

These records bear testimony, of themselves, to the general accuracy of the following Note* recorded by myself in 1877 :—

“ I can fully corroborate all that Captain Grey and Dr. Bellew say as to the willingness of the Ameer at Umballa to consider the subject of British Agencies in Afghanistan had he received encouragement to enter officially into the subject, and had his expectations of being granted a new treaty been responded to. The same evidence which certified to Shere Ali’s desire for a treaty certified to his willingness to receive British Agents. If the one was imaginary, so was the other. Being at that time in Lord Mayo’s full confidence, I can testify to the fact that both he himself and those associated with him accepted the evidence of the Ameer’s wishes in both cases as genuine. The time had, however, not arrived for the consideration of either question ; and the orders of Her Majesty’s Government, added to Lord Mayo’s own personal views as to the requirement of the moment, and the danger of suddenly deviating from the policy of the Viceroy who had just left India, induced him to discourage the official mention of either matter at the conferences. Moreover, His Highness made no formal proposition on the subject, hoping, as we were led to believe, that it might come first from the Viceroy, and thereby ensure him better terms.”

But, although, as Private Secretary to the Viceroy in 1869, I was in Lord Mayo’s “full confidence,”

* Colonel Burne’s Note, p. 174, Afghanistan, No. 1.

I do not desire to place my own recollections or memoranda in too great prominence. I am content to substantiate my statement above quoted by means of documents which were received and recorded, *at the time*, in the official archives of the Indian Foreign Office, copies of which documents have been, since the Umballa durbar,* in my possession.

I beg, in the first instance, to refer to a record of a Council held by the Ameer at Lahore on the 16th March, 1869, whilst *en route* to Umballa.

This record was furnished by X. Y., a faithful servant who possessed, and still possesses, the confidence of the Government of India, and whose accuracy in similar cases has borne the test of years and has not been found wanting.

At this Council the following conversations between Shere Ali and his confidential advisers took place :—

“ The Ameer then said,—‘ Should the British authorities propose that a European Agent be stationed at Cabul itself, although I am myself agreeable to such arrangement, but the people of Cabul are turbulent and mischievous—should such European Agent be injured in any way, which God forbid, I would be disgraced. The late Ameer, my father, on these very considerations, refused to have a European Agent at his capital. But if an Agent be located in the interior, at places like Candahar, or Balkh, or Herat, there

* They have also been published, in whole or in part, in recent Blue Books.

would be no objection. Such an arrangement would be advantageous to both Governments ; for instance, at the present time the people of the Lower Seistan have commenced encroachments on the Candahar boundaries. Lower Seistan was formerly always attached to Afghanistan, and has been occupied by Persia only since a short time. We are not aware what agreement exists between the British and Persian Governments regarding Lower Seistan. If there should be a European Agent on the border, he would be possessed of the necessary information, and would be at hand to consult regarding affairs relating to territories beyond the borders.' "

" All the members approved of what the Ameer had said."

I beg, in the second place, to refer to a Note written, *at the time*, by the Under Secretary in the Foreign Department of the Government of India. This Note is dated 26th March, 1869, and was received and officially recorded as a genuine document. It ran as follows :—

" The Viceroy may possibly desire to have without delay the following details which I have learnt from Punjab officials in the course of conversation yesterday and to-day. The Ameer is prepared, if asked, to allow European Agents at Candahar, Herat, and Balkh, but he would raise difficulties, though probably not insuperable ones, about such an officer at Cabul."

I beg, in the third place, to refer to a conversation between Major Grey and Shere Ali, in which allusion was made by the Ameer to the same subject.

The record of this conversation was equally received and recorded *at the time* as genuine. Before quoting it, however, it may be expedient to describe the exact position held by Major Grey at the Umballa conference, and the opinion which Lord Mayo held of that officer. I feel bound, in justice to Captain Grey, to take this course, as some unmerited doubts have been cast on his position at Umballa, and the accuracy of his statements made then and since.

Major Grey is an officer of recognised experience and ability. For his general intelligence and complete knowledge of Persian, Lord Mayo selected him as special interpreter at Umballa between His Excellency and Shere Ali. Of Lord Mayo's personal opinion of him I need only quote the following statement* from many others of a similar kind :—

“Captain Grey, who knows them (the Afghans) all thoroughly, and is steady and wise, and entirely in our confidence (as he was interpreter at Umballa) keeps up a purely unofficial correspondence with Nur Mahomed, the Minister. This is useful.”

No one in 1869 ventured to call in question this officer's veracity; and in that year the following statement, signed and verified by the Foreign Secretary, was handed in to the Viceroy, was accepted as genuine, and was recorded in the archives of the Foreign Office. It is dated 31st March 1869, and runs as follows :—

“The Ameer is prepared to act on what he may see

is the nature of the friendship the British propose to afford him. If, as hitherto, merely acknowledging the ruler of Cabul *de facto*, well and good, but if prepared to acknowledge and support him and the heir he may point out (the contrary having produced the present troubles), there is nothing he will not accede to. "He is open to any proposition for securing his northern border. While doubtful of any Russian power for aggression for some years to come, still he thinks precautions should be taken ; he would construct forts on his own part, or under our superintendence, and admit European garrisons if ever desired ; he would gladly see an Agent or engineer superintendent in Balkh, Herat, or anywhere but actually in Cabul, which might lead to the supposition of his being a puppet."

But there is yet another officer's evidence in favour of this view—an officer who was attached to the Ameer's personal staff as his interpreter ; an officer who was a personal friend of Shere Ali's, who was on the most intimate terms with him, who had a thorough knowledge of the Pushtoo language, and could hardly retain a wrong impression of his many conversations with His Highness. This officer, Dr. Bellew, writing in 1875, says that the impression left on his mind at Umballa was that "Shere Ali would gladly see Agents at Herat and Candahar."*

I have, however, no wish to rely solely on the evidence thus given ; I therefore may be permitted to

* See p. 278, Afghanistan, No. 1.

quote Lord Mayo's own words, when he wrote* to Sir Henry Rawlinson after the Umballa durbar, treating the question of an Agency at Herat as a *new* one which did not take a prominent place at the Umballa conference; testifying, at the same time, to Shere Ali's willingness, although evincing, in his opinion, no positive anxiety, to receive British Agencies at Herat, Candahar, or Balkh, if desired.

Lord Mayo writes:—

“ It was repeatedly explained to him (Shere Ali) that we should never send a British soldier to assist him against his rebellious subjects. . . . I own I am very sceptical as to the propriety of placing a British Resident at Herat, but I will *reserve* my opinion until I *hear the reasons*. As a rule, I am totally opposed to sending European Politicals to any Asiatic town if it can be avoided; they are a dangerous class, and many a misfortune can be traced to their honest but misplaced activity. I do not believe, from what the Ameer said at Umballa, that he would *offer any opposition* to an English Agent being placed at Candahar, Herat, or Balkh, though he would strongly object to the appearance of one at *Cabul*. But I do not *think* he wished for it anywhere, fearing the effect it might have on his own subjects.”

When, in 1875, the question of an Agency at Herat unexpectedly caused a difference of opinion between Her Majesty's Home Government and that of India, Lord Northbrook's Government endeavoured to shake

* Lord Mayo to Sir Henry Rawlinson, 10 June 1869.

the evidence given and accepted as genuine in 1869. But it failed to do so to any material extent. Major Grey's evidence, indeed, became more emphatic than that given in 1869 ; for he says,* "the Ameer *did* freely consent to the appointment of British officers in Balkh, Herat, or anywhere but actually at Cabul ;" and the Government of India could not but acknowledge that Captain Grey's evidence was not to be ignored. For, in addressing the Secretary of State for India† in that year, they said :—

"On the whole, however, we think that either the Ameer himself or his Minister, Noor Mahomed Shah, did, in confidential communication with Captain Grey, express a readiness to accept at some future time, not far distant, the presence of British Agents in Afghanistan, excepting Cabul itself."

Passing from this correspondence, we come to evidence of a more recent date, on which the Duke of Argyll places much reliance—that of Mr. Seton Karr, who, in 1869, filled the position of Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. Mr. Seton Karr's evidence is culled from his private memorandum book. That evidence is not on official record, either in India or at the India Office ; and I give prominence to this fact as showing the secondary importance to be attached to it. It is an axiom of Indian administration to record every word, every line, every expression of importance, which passes between a Viceroy and an Asiatic

* See p. 144, Afghanistan, No. 1.

† To Secretary of State, 7 June 1875, p. 129, Afghanistan, No. 1.

potentate, or a Foreign Secretary and an Asiatic minister. This is a point on which most scrupulous care is taken. It is necessary to existing, and vital to future, interests; and, such being the case, no responsible Government can justifiably accept extracts from private memoranda given ten years after an event, unless fully supported by the official records of the date to which those memoranda may refer. Mr. Seton Karr is a distinguished Indian servant, whose veracity, honour, and ability, are not to be impeached. But to what, after all, does his testimony amount? Why, merely to substantiate that of Captain Grey, viz. that the Ameer did not want a Resident at *Cabul*, and to a complete negation of the solemn guarantee on which the Duke of Argyll relies. I give his own words.

(1.) Mr. Seton Karr's letter to Lord Lawrence, dated 18th November, 1878.

This is what he says to Lord Lawrence:—

“As instructed by Lord Mayo, I did broach (to the Ameer) the subject of an English Resident at *Cabul*. Both he and his Minister clearly intimated that they could not accede to this step. It would be viewed with suspicion, they said, by a strong party at *Cabul*. It would excite prejudice and hostility; if anything happened to the Resident, the Ameer would be blamed; and many similar arguments. He certainly did add that, *personally*, *he might have no strong objections to a Resident*, but urged that his chiefs and nobles would resent the presence of an Englishman, and that he could not consent. I considered then, as I do now,

that this latter expression was merely meant to soften down his refusal. Indeed, from the Ameer's manner, as well as from that of his Minister, I judged that he disliked this idea as much as anyone, and had no wish for any English political officer. *The subject was not again pressed*, and Lord Mayo never, I think, apprehended that the proposal would find acceptance. My communications with the Ameer and with Nur Mahommed were long and frequent.* I noted down these results at the time. I have frequently thought over the matter since, and I am quite certain of my facts."

(2.) Mr. Seton Karr's letter to the Under Secretary of State for India, dated 10th December, 1878:—

"I repeat that I was distinctly empowered by Lord Mayo to ask the Ameer whether he would consent to an English Resident (at Cabul), and his reply was that though *personally he might not object*, it 'would do him harm in the eyes of his people,' and he and his Ministers used other arguments to the same effect. This was by me reported to Lord Mayo in the presence

* In a letter addressed to me on the 4th of April 1869, Mr. Seton Karr, referring to his conversations with Nur Mahomed, wrote—

"I could not find an opportunity last night to tell His Excellency that the Ameer, through his Minister, clearly understands the wishes of the Government about trade and the passes," &c.

In a Note of the same date, enclosed to me for Lord Mayo's information, Captain Grey made a further report of his private conversations with the Ameer on matters which Lord Mayo desired him (Captain Grey) to discuss with His Highness, in the course of which Shere Ali "expressed his readiness to meet the British Government half-way in every matter that interested them."

of Lord Sandhurst, and the *subject was at once dropped* by the Viceroy's express desire."

The Duke of Argyll, in a letter to Mr. Seton Karr, dated the 14th December (published in the "Daily News" of the 18th idem), congratulates him on having spoken the truth; believing, apparently, that his evidence had disproved the statement that the Ameer was not unwilling in 1869 to receive European Agents in his country (except at Cabul), and that Mr. Seton Karr had given a denial to this assertion.

But all Mr. Seton Karr apparently adduces from his private memoranda is the fact stated by Major Grey and others in 1869, that the Ameer would "raise difficulties, although probably not insuperable ones," to the location of a Resident at *Cabul*. Mr. Seton Karr—no doubt inadvertently—omitted to state that the evidence tendered and accepted as genuine at Umballa showed that Shere Ali was not unwilling to have considered the question of the location of British officers *elsewhere* than at the capital, had he been asked, or had the matter been looked upon as of sufficient importance (which it was not) to have been urged upon him by the Viceroy.

That Lord Mayo did not really desire, in 1869, to send British officers to Cabul, or to any other part of Afghanistan, as permanent Agents, or, in other words, to exercise, *in the state of things then existing*, interference in the "internal affairs of the country," is evident from his published despatches and from his letters quoted by the Duke of Argyll. But before each of his conferences with Shere Ali, he went over

with Major Grey, in my presence, the ground which he intended to take up in the event of the Ameer bringing the subject forward ; and his whole object was, whilst making up his mind to refuse to allow officers to go *then* to Afghanistan, yet to leave his hands entirely free as to sending them at any *future* time. I am sure Major Grey will bear me out in this statement; it may also be in his recollection that the Ameer took a sudden whim into his head as to taking his friend Colonel Charles Chamberlain back with him to Cabul—a step to which Lord Mayo declined to accede.

Whilst the Ameer was not unwilling, the Viceroy was not willing, to see British officers in Afghanistan. Lord Mayo only wished to establish what he called an “intermediate” policy. He had no wish to interfere, nor was there at that time any object in doing so, with the internal politics of the country or with the family quarrels of the Barakzaies; consequently at his personal conferences with Shere Ali, he gave him no encouragement to bring forward the question of Agents, or other measures involving responsibility in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Lord Mayo’s own views in this respect are contained in his private correspondence with the Duke of Argyll and others.

Thus, he wrote, on the 2nd March 1869,—

“I am entirely opposed to any attempt to take any direct part in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.”

On the 3rd of June 1869 he wrote,—

“As the invasion by a foreign European Power of his territory was never alluded to by the Ameer or me,

our course of action, in the event of such an occurrence taking place, is not affected by anything that took place at Umballa."

He again wrote, on the 10th June 1869,—

" It was repeatedly explained to him (Shere Ali) that we should never send a British soldier to assist him against his rebellious subjects."

And again, on the 2nd July 1871,—

" *Then* (if Afghanistan were threatened from without) it might be indispensable to the safety of India that we should support the Ruler of Cabul with men, money, and arms ; but the Ameer was told at Umballa that no British officer or soldier would ever cross his frontier to *help him to put down a rebellion*. Afghans do not fight when they can murder or bribe. As our officers do not indulge in the latter business, they would probably, if employed in Afghanistan, be disposed of by assassination, in which case, I think, the British lion would naturally seek revenge. I think we should wait a long time before we encouraged civil war in Afghanistan by giving either *officers or money to assist any Barakzai in conquering another*."

Again, in regard to the general line of policy to be pursued in future contingencies towards Afghanistan and other neighbouring States, he wrote:—*

" I have never met a sensible politician who held the opinion that our true policy is to await an invasion of India within our frontiers. I have frequently laid down what I believe to be the cardinal points of

* Memorandum, 29 December 1871.

Anglo-Indian policy. They may be summed up in a few words. We should establish with our frontier States of Khelat, Afghanistan, Yarkund, Nepal, and Burmah, intimate relations of friendship; we should make them feel that, though we are all-powerful, we desire to support their nationality; that when necessity arises we might assist them with money, arms, and even, perhaps, in certain eventualities, with men. We could thus create in them outworks of our Empire; and assuring them that the days of annexation are passed, make them know that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by endeavouring to deserve our favour and support. Further, we should strenuously oppose any attempt to neutralise those territories in the European sense, or to sanction or invite the interference of any European Power in their affairs. It may take years to develope this policy. It is contrary to what has been hitherto our course in India; but if it is once established, recognised, and appreciated, our Empire will be comparatively secure."

These were the general views held consistently by Lord Mayo during his Indian administration. He had no wish in 1869 to send British Agents to Afghanistan, knowing that to do so at that moment was to court risk for no corresponding benefit. They could then only have gone to interfere with domestic politics, or to support the Ameer's dynasty. Afghanistan was not threatened from without. Although Russia had made rapid conquests in Central Asia, she had not approached inconveniently near to the Afghan border; and Persia showed no symptom of aggression on

Herat. Consequently the discussions at Umballa between Lord Mayo and Shere Ali dealt rather with Afghanistan recovering from domestic brawls, than with Afghanistan fearing the aggressions of a foreign power. This state of things gave a very distinct colour to the Umballa proceedings, and made all that was then said and done essentially different from transactions of a more recent date.

Lord Mayo was not, however, satisfied with the mode in which we were represented in Afghanistan, and he, therefore, authorised the Foreign Secretary to confer tentatively with Nur Mahomed on the subject. I give the question put, and the answer given, in the two conferences held on this subject on the 1st and 3rd of April, 1869 :—
1st April. “ *Question.* Would the Ameer sanction *Native Agents* in Afghanistan, either as visitors or as permanent residents, supposing the British Government wished it? ” *Reply.* “ The Minister remarked that he did not wish to commit himself, and asked rather anxiously whether European Agents were intended, observing, at the same time, that it was no use to send any but Mahomedans; Hindoos were of no good at all. He begged that his reply might not be put on paper. He said that he first distinctly wished to ascertain the Ameer’s sentiments. He added, he was looking far forward, and the day might come when the ‘ Russ ’ would arrive, and the Ameer would be glad not only of British officers as Agents, but of arms and troops to back them. ”

3rd April. “ Referring to the points which were

reserved in the conversation of April 1st, 1869, the Minister said that there was no occasion to include Ghazni as a place of residence for a British Agent, as Ghazni was included in Cabul. The Ameer was ready to have a writer to accompany him wherever he moved, and to allow of men in Turkestan and Balkh, when the country was more settled."

"At the close of the interview the Foreign Secretary took the Minister apart and clearly explained to him His Excellency's instructions that, under no circumstances, was the Ameer to *expect* that British troops would cross the border to put down civil war or domestic contention. This intimation was repeated to the Minister by the Foreign Secretary at a subsequent interview, and the Minister's reply on both occasions was clear and satisfactory as to the Ameer's *full understanding* on this point."

In alluding to the conversations, Lord Mayo* said:—

"Two interviews have taken place between the confidential adviser of His Highness Syud Noor Mahomed Shah and our Foreign Secretary. At these interviews various matters of importance were fully discussed, and the means whereby trade with Afghanistan could be encouraged, and additional measures for securing the peace of the frontier could be promoted, were carefully considered. An opportunity was also taken, at the same time, to inform the Minister, in the

* Government of India to Secretary of State, 3 April 1869, p. 89, Afghanistan, No. 1.

clearest and most explicit terms, that the British Government would always abstain from any direct interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and that under no circumstances could *British troops* or *British officers* be employed across the frontier in quelling civil contentions or domestic strife."

Lord Mayo's object at Umballa was to keep his Government *free* from engagements and pledges of any kind except those contained in the letter addressed to Shere Ali, dated 31st March 1869,* which intimated to him that whilst the British Government did not desire to interfere in the "internal affairs of Afghanistan," yet that it would "view with severe displeasure" any attempts on the part of his rivals to disturb his position as Ruler of Cabul and rekindle civil war; and that it would further endeavour, from time to time, "by such means as circumstances may require," to strengthen the Government of His Highness.

Finding, however, that the Home Government did not view these pledges with favour, he justified them in some detail in a subsequent despatch,† describing his general policy at Umballa in the following words:—

"The policy that we had endeavoured to establish may be termed an *intermediate* one; that is to say, that while we distinctly intimated to the Ameer that, under no circumstances, should a British soldier ever cross his frontier to assist him in coercing his rebellious subjects; that no European officers would be placed

* See p. 90, Afghanistan, No. 1.

† Government of India, 1 July 1869, p. 94, Afghanistan, No. 1.

as Residents in his cities; that no fixed subsidy or money allowance would be given for any named period; that no promise of assistance in other ways would be made; that no treaty would be entered into, obliging us under every circumstance to recognise him and his descendants rulers of Afghanistan, yet that we were prepared by the most open and absolute present recognition, and by every public evidence of friendly disposition, of respect for his character and interest in his fortunes, to give him all the moral support in our power, and that in addition we were willing to assist him with money, arms, ammunition, native artificers, and in other ways, whenever we deemed it possible or desirable to do so."

I admit that the phrase in this letter touching the "European officers" may be construed to bear, to some extent, the interpretation placed upon it by the Duke of Argyll, in the light of Lord Mayo's private letter of the 3rd of June 1869.

But I affirm with confidence, on the evidence of Lord Mayo's other letters and the official records of 1869, that no *pledge* of the nature suggested was given to the Ameer at Umballa. It was Shere Ali who, on first arrival at Umballa, expressed his "willingness" to receive British Agents at his outposts, and his absolute "wish" to receive them if Russia ever approached nearer to him. It was Lord Mayo who knew that such a measure, if adopted by him, would draw from the Ameer further pressure for a treaty on the lines of the agreement of 1857, and commit him to support the Ameer's dynasty.

The subject came, therefore, into the category of what the Ameer was not to have.

I much regret, by any testimony of my own, to cast a shadow of doubt on any expressions used by Lord Mayo in his private letters. But these expressions must be read, as I said before, in the light of the official records of 1869, and of the spirit of that great and good Viceroy's whole policy. I feel sure that no one more than Lord Mayo himself, were he now alive, would regret the meaning attached to words which he intended merely to apply to the fact that he had no desire to force a "Resident at Cabul" on the Ameer, or to send officers across the frontier to countenance Shere Ali's family quarrels, and commit the British Government to support his dynasty in the state of things existing at that period.

Is it possible that Lord Mayo, whose sole object at Umballa was to establish an intermediate policy capable of future development, and to keep his hands free in regard to future contingencies, would tie to all time his own action, and the action of his successors, by a pledge in the sense understood by the Duke of Argyll? Could he have done so without specific instructions from the Home Government? Had so solemn a pledge been given, would it not have been as solemnly placed on official record? Would it not have been given personally by the Viceroy to Shere Ali? Would not Shere Ali have mentioned it in subsequent transactions? Would not Nur Mahomed have brought it forward as an unanswerable argument to Lord North-

brook in 1873,* when his Foreign Secretary pressed on that wily Asiatic the advantages of a permanent British representative at Cabul? Would he not equally have given to such a pledge a prominent place in his arguments at the Peshawur Conference of 1877, and have thereby effectually stopped all further discussion?

Nur Mahomed certainly did constantly refer, both in 1873 and 1877, to Lord Mayo's pledges to the Ameer, but only in the sense that those pledges meant an unconditional guarantee of protection without return of any kind from Shere Ali—an argument successfully disproved both by Lord Northbrook and Lord Lytton.

It stands to reason that if the Ameer was not unwilling in 1869 to receive British Agents into his country (except at Cabul), he would hardly have devoted all his energies to obtain a concession, a solemn pledge, to the contrary from Lord Mayo.

If the evidence, in regard to this willingness, of the Viceroy's confidential interpreter, Major Grey; of the

* See Government of India letter, para. 13, 10 May 1877, p. 162, Afghanistan, No. 1. It is remarkable that in none of the arguments used by Nur Mahomed at any time was mention made of any pledge given to the Ameer by Lord Mayo on the subject of Agents. It is equally remarkable, as showing the slow rate of progression of the Afghan nation, that Nur Mahomed repeated the same excuses for delay, in regard to the question of British Agents in Afghanistan, as urged twenty years previously by Hafiz-ji. No wonder the Ameer exclaimed at Peshawur, "All people are advancing in the arts of peace and civilization. It is only we Afghans who remain the ignorant asses we have always been." (Commissioner of Peshawur's Report, 12th March 1869).

Ameer's friend and confidential interpreter, Dr. Bellew; of the Viceroy's Private Secretary; and of Lord Mayo himself; are collectively to be treated as inaccurate and valueless, then I have nothing more to say. But I venture to think that no after attempts to shake our evidence, or to throw doubts on records *accepted and officially recorded in 1869*, should be allowed to weigh with any reasonable mind as against facts established in that year, accepted by the Government of that day as genuine, and not doubted or attempted to be shaken until many years afterwards.

If, on the other hand, our evidence is trustworthy, then the argument now put forward that British officers in Afghanistan were in 1869 the one dread and abhorrence of Shere Ali* falls to the ground.

It is of course possible that Lord Mayo, when he instructed Mr. Seton Karr to let the subject of a Resident at Cabul "drop," may have given him some general authority to assure Nur Mahomed that he had no wish to send an officer to Cabul against the Ameer's wish. Admitting this, for the sake of argument, let us examine for a few moments how the fact affects the policy adopted since 1875-76, by Her Majesty's present Government and the Viceroy.

The instructions† sent by Lord Salisbury to the Governor-General of India on the 22nd January 1875, made the establishment of a British Agency at Herat (not at Cabul) dependent on the "assent of the

* "The Eastern Question," Vol. ii. p. 271.

† Afghanistan, No. 1., p. 128.

Ameer," His instructions of the 19th November 1875 pointed equally to the necessity of obtaining the "concurrence" of the Ameer even in receiving a *temporary* mission in his capital to confer on Central Asian affairs. The instructions of the 28th February 1876, given to Lord Lytton, pointed equally to a temporary mission to Cabul "to overcome the Ameer's apparent reluctance," as reported by Lord Northbrook, to the establishment of Agencies in Afghanistan; and to the offer of great and permanent benefits, the only return for which benefits was to be His Highness's consent to the placing of British Agents in those parts of his dominions whence they might best watch the "course of events" outside his dominions. There is certainly no sign in these papers of any attempt to break solemn pledges, even had they been given, or any desire to force Agents on Shere Ali "against his wish."

From my position as Private Secretary to Lord Lytton, I am able to say from personal experience that nothing could exceed, from the first moment he landed in India, the patience with which that nobleman dealt with Shere Ali, and the pains he took in carrying out the instructions of the Home Government.

✓ On arrival at Calcutta he arranged, with the unanimous concurrence of his Council, to send his own aide-de-camp, Ressaldar Khanan Khan, to the Ameer, charged with a letter and verbal messages to Shere Ali, informing him of his intention to depute Sir Lewis Pelly temporarily to Cabul, or to any other place convenient to His Highness,

to confer on "matters of common interest to the two Governments." No question of Agents was mentioned, but the verbal communications which the Res-saldar was empowered to make were of a most friendly and assuring nature."

Shere Ali declined to receive Lord Lytton's Envoy; and this within a month after the Viceroy's arrival in India, long before Lord Lytton committed the offences of which the Duke of Argyll so emphatically accuses him. Yes, the Ameer, who had two Russian Native Agents at his Court, who was in full correspondence with General Kauffman, and who was, according to intelligence afterwards received from reliable sources, making preparations for exciting a jihad at Cabul against the British Government, declined to receive the British Envoy. The matters to be laid before the Ameer were of too great importance to be sent in writing for the criticism of General Kauffman; the Ameer could not come at that moment to India; and the Viceroy did not feel justified in submitting his proposals to any one but the Ameer himself; he desired, however, to be patient; and although much disappointed at the Ameer's refusal, he took no hurried action: he again consulted his Council, and, with the concurrence of the majority of his advisers, deemed it right, under the special circumstances of the moment, not to acquiesce in that refusal, but to reply to Shere Ali's letter in firmer language than under ordinary circumstances he would have used, warning him not to hastily reject the hand of friendship held out to him. Lord Lytton had special reasons, justified by the events

of the moment, for wording his communication in this language, urging the Ameer to reconsider his position and the chances he was throwing away of a firm alliance with the British Government. That communication went to the Ameer, after careful and lengthened consideration at Simla, on the 8th of July 1876.

After a delay of nearly two months, the Ameer replied, still refusing to receive Sir Lewis Pelly, but proposing that the British Vakeel at Cabul should be summoned to Simla to expound the whole state of affairs, and to hear what the British Government had to say to the Ameer. So reluctant was Lord Lytton to treat the Ameer harshly or hastily, that he put aside all his own wishes on the subject, and consented to this course. By the hand of this Vakeel he entrusted, for communication to Shere Ali, an *Aide Memoire*, dated 13th Oct. 1876.

This *Aide Memoire* informed Shere Ali, clearly and succinctly, of the great and liberal concessions the British Government was prepared to grant him, and of the reasonable return required by it for those concessions.

In offering the Ameer these terms, viz. a treaty of alliance, a dynastic and territorial guarantee, and prospective financial and military aid, Lord Lytton distinctly indicated, in conciliatory language, that he had no desire to press Agents on the Ameer against his wish. But it was clearly impossible to undertake the weighty obligations, above noted, on behalf of the Ameer unless His Highness, on his part, consented to

accept the conditions offered to him ; and this was all that was intimated to Shere Ali. He was asked to discuss the matter frankly, and he knew perfectly well that the discussion would be a fair and reasonable one on the part of the Indian authorities.

In this *Aide Memoire* Lord Lytton said, in effect, "I am prepared to give you a treaty, guarantee your dynasty, a large annual subsidy, and defence from outward aggression, some of which benefits you desired in 1869, some in 1873 ; if you desire them now, all I ask in return is permission to establish a British Agent at Herat or elsewhere on your frontier to watch affairs beyond it. These officers are not to interfere with you. If they do, I will at once recall them." In short, to be accurate, I give his own words.* He said :—

" I authorise the Agent to tell the Ameer that I am glad to find it in my power to relieve his mind from many apprehensions as to my intentions, which appear to have been caused by circumstances previous to my assumption of the Government of India. I authorise the Agent to tell the Ameer that, if His Highness wishes to make me his friend, I will be a warm and true, a fast and firm, friend to him, doing all that is practically in my power to stand by him in his difficulties, to cordially support him, to strengthen his throne, to establish his dynasty, and to confirm the succession in the person of his son Sirdar Abdullah Jan,"/etc.

" I am, therefore, willing to give him a treaty of friendship and alliance, and also to afford him assistance

* *Aide Memoire*, p. 185, Afghanistan, No. 1.

in arms, men, and money, for the defence of his territory against unprovoked foreign invasion. I am further willing to give him immediate pecuniary assistance, and to give to his son, Abdullah Jan, the public recognition and support of the British Government.

“ But I cannot do any one of these things unless the Ameer is, on his part, equally willing to afford me the practical means of assisting His Highness in the protection of his frontier, by the residence of a British Agent at Herat, and at such other parts of that frontier, most exposed to danger from without, as may be hereafter agreed upon.

“ I do not even wish to embarrass the Ameer, whose present difficulties I fully sympathise with, by carrying out this arrangement until after the signature of a Treaty of Alliance between us, on terms which ought to satisfy His Highness of the perfect loyalty of our friendship; nor until after the Ameer shall have had the means of making known to his people that the presence of a British Agent in Afghanistan signifies that he is there without interfering in internal State matters, as the firm supporter of the Ameer and of the heir-apparent, to aid them with all the influence and power of the British Government in defending their country against foreign aggression, and to discourage attempts on the part of the disaffected to disturb its internal tranquillity or weaken the throne of His Highness.

“ It will be the duty of any such British Agents to watch the external affairs of the frontier, furnishing timely and trustworthy intelligence thereof to the

Ameer, as well as to the British Government. Should the Ameer at any time have good cause to complain that any British Agent has interfered in the internal affairs of the country, the Agent will at once be re-called.

"I have no wish to disturb the existing Native Agency at Cabul, or to urge upon the Ameer the reception of a permanent British Envoy at his Court, if His Highness thinks that the presence of such an Envoy would be a source of embarrassment to him. But, in that case, I should, of course, expect that no obstacle be placed in the way of confidential communications between myself and His Highness, by means of special Envoys, whenever the interests of the two Governments may require them.

"In short, it is my object and desire that the treaty of friendship and alliance, as well as the presence of British Agents on the Afghan frontier, should be a great strength and support to the Ameer, both at home as well as abroad, and not a source of weakness or embarrassment to him."

In his personal conference with the British Vakeel (who was individually opposed to anything like his own supersession in Afghanistan by temporary or permanent European Agents, and was not therefore a very cordial co-operator) Lord Lytton used firm language. It was necessary to show this official that whilst the British Government did not desire to be unfriendly to Shere Ali, it was not a Government to be trifled with. The Ameer, after all, was only asked to consider the proposals laid before him; they were not being forced upon him against his will. The Vakeel expressed,

or at any rate pretended to express, his hope that Shere Ali would consent to consider the proposals so beneficial to his interests. But the hostile feeling at Cabul against the British Government remained unchanged. On the return of the Vakeel, the Ameer, under pretence of sickness, declined to receive him for some weeks; and when at last he did so it was not in any very friendly spirit. In fact, there was treachery at work, and a further delay of three months; during which the Viceroy vainly waited for a reply to, or even a recognition of, his friendly *Aide Memoire*.

At length, on the 28th January, 1877, the Prime Minister, apparently as a reply to the *Aide Memoire*, appeared at Peshawur. The Viceroy accepted the deputation of this functionary as a token of Shere Ali's acquiescence in the discussion of the important matters impending between them, on the bases of that document. But he was deceived. Nur Mahomed wasted meetings which lasted from the 30th of January to the 19th February, 1877, in mere recriminations as to past policy. He professed to have no authority to discuss the bases of the *Aide Memoire*; and all this time Shere Ali continued his activity at Cabul in *jehad* matters; and now openly, as he had hitherto done secretly, issued to the whole of the tribes down the frontier, sunnuds obtained from the Akhoond of Swat, authorising a religious war against the British Government, a war which might have broken out at any moment. Shere Ali was in nightly conference with Russian Agents; affairs in Europe were critical, and Lord Lytton was only too glad to take advantage of

the death of Nur Mahomed to avoid further pitfalls. He now found it impossible to pledge the British Government to a treaty with a ruler who so clearly showed the cloven hoof, and he put an end, on justifiable grounds, to a conference which could in these circumstances only end in mischief. Lord Lytton took this step not only with the full concurrence of his confidential advisers, but with the approval of the Home Government.

Such is the history of the commencement and termination of the Peshawur conference. Whilst the Indian Viceroy was endeavouring to maintain satisfactory relations with the Ameer by offering him all he was ever supposed to desire, in return for a concession to which he had not in former years indicated insuperable objections, Shere Ali was nourishing against the British Government an inveterate animosity, an animosity rendered specially dangerous by the past intimacy of his relations with General Kauffmann. This intimacy we were powerless to prevent or counteract on account of our continued and accepted exclusion from Afghanistan.

In the then existing state of things in Europe it became necessary for the Government of India to remain passive, so long as it could do so with dignity, and so long as the Ameer did not commit any further overt act of hostility.

But all further efforts to strengthen our relations with him, and to place them on a proper footing, were useless ; and close intercourse between the two Governments practically ceased. Events had, in fact, proved the correctness of Lord Mayo's view of Shere

Ali, as expressed in 1869 : "He is a wilful, impulsive man, leaving much to fate, and possessing few of the generous qualities which characterised his father. We cannot do much but watch him as well as we can."

I confine my observations to facts in regard to which I have personal knowledge and recollection. I do not, therefore, attempt to touch on those later passages in our relations with Cabul which followed the Ameer's reception, in July last, of a Russian mission. I do not write in any controversial spirit, nor do I desire to do more than fulfil a duty to Lord Mayo, to Major Grey, and to myself, in establishing plain facts, and in removing doubts as to the accuracy of our evidence.

I commend the plain facts set forth in this narrative to the impartial consideration of fair-minded men, before they accept as conclusive the Duke of Argyll's estimate of the evidence, on particular points, of witnesses opposed to his own view of the case; and his criticisms on the action of the present Viceroy of India and the Government which Lord Lytton has faithfully served.

OWEN TUDOR BURNE.

London, 15th Feb. 1879.

NOTE.—Since writing the foregoing observations, I have read a letter from Major Grey in the *Times* of this day's date. As this letter strengthens my own evidence bearing on the Umballa conferences, I append an extract from it :—

" I was confidentially employed by Lord Mayo on the occasion of the meeting with Ameer Shere Ali Khan at Umballa. I kept full memoranda of everything that occurred, and these, with copies of official reports, semi-official notes, and other papers that passed through my hands, are now before me.

" Mr. Seton Karr should be cognizant of what passed between myself and the Ameer, or his Wazir, on various occasions during the Umballa meeting, for I embodied the results of my interviews in official reports, dated the 29th of March, the 3rd of April, and the 4th of April, 1869. In the last of these, which was a summary of my entire proceedings, I gave an abstract of the results of private interviews with the Ameer, or Wazir, on the 26th of March (before the Viceroy's arrival); the 27th, 29th, 30th, and the 31st of March, the 1st of April (three interviews), the 2nd of April (several interviews), and the 3rd of April. In the first of them is the following passage :—

" ' He (the Ameer) is open to any proposition for securing his northern border; while doubtful of any Russian power for aggression for some years to come, still thinks precautions should be taken; would construct forts on his own part or under our superintendence, and admit European garrisons if ever desired; would gladly see an agent or engineer superintendent there (in Balkh), Herat, or anywhere but actually in Cabul, which might lead to the supposition of his being a puppet. There would be no danger to such did they respect the Afghans and themselves.'

" My summary of the 4th of April, 1869, before referred to, states that the Ameer was a party to this conversation, which occurred previous to the first private interview of the Ameer with the Viceroy on the 29th of March. *I obtained the Ameer's opinions on this point with a view to the matter being broached at that interview, which, however, for some reason, was not done.* The second private interview between the Viceroy and Ameer occurred on the 3rd of April. My official summary of the 4th of April, says :—

" ' On Friday, the 2nd of April, I had several interviews with the Ameer and Wazir regarding points to be settled by the latter with the Foreign Secretary next morning (the discussion regarding

trade routes) and by the Ameer at the next day's private interview.'

" My private memoranda say on this head :—

" " In accordance with my representations, therefore, a new letter was addressed to the Ameer, to which I was directed, if possible, to obtain a reply of complete satisfaction, and also to arrive at a definite understanding with him on various other points noted below, after which should be held the second private interview, which should in a manner sanction and confirm the results of the negotiations. The points were : (1) That the Ameer should accede to our deputation of native Agents wherever we pleased—to this the Ameer agreed and promised to assist them in every way ; (2) to ascertain whether the Ameer was agreeable to the deputation of an Envoy at some future date—on this point the Ameer expressed his willingness to receive an Envoy as soon as things had somewhat settled down, anywhere save at Cabul, where he thought it would affect his power with the people. . . . "

" In March, 1875, the Government of India inquired from me whether my knowledge of what passed at Umballa led me to believe that the Ameer would receive British officers at Herat or Candahar. I replied, giving the facts detailed above, and adding, ' I may note that the Ameer was at the time eager to meet our views, or what he supposed to be such, and his whole attitude was that of one anxious to please.' I further explained myself, semi-officially, as follows :—

" " In saying that he would receive an Envoy when matters had somewhat settled down, the Ameer referred, as I understood, merely to his immediate troubles, Afghanistan being then still much disturbed and a campaign in Turkestan imminent. I had been instructed to ask whether the Ameer would receive an Envoy " at some future date." He had agreed to the deputation of native Agents " wherever we pleased," and his only stipulation regarding British Envoys was that they should not reside in Cabul. /

" Your obedient servant,

" H. GREY, Major, Political Agent and Superintendant, Bahawalpur State.

" Bahawalpur, Jan. 18."

O. T. B.

24th Feb. 1879.

OUR SCIENTIFIC FRONTIER.

I purpose confining my remarks upon the important subject of the proposed rectification of our frontier line exclusively to the present military and political aspects of the question as, equally with Sir H. Norman, I should deprecate any reference to the policy which has preceded the present war in Afghanistan, for I cannot but consider that the recent Parliamentary discussions have been based upon an entirely false issue, and that the question which the Nation really required to be solved, was not whether Lords Lawrence and Northbrooke in acting upon the traditional motto of the British Foreign Office, viz., "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," failed to take the necessary steps to establish our influence at Cabul, and thus to frustrate the action of Russia, action which, although fully anticipated by all who had carefully studied the political strategy of that great Power, both in Europe and Asia, may have been looked upon by the noble Lords and their advisers as still probably very remote, but whether, when we found that communications were frequently passing between General Kauffmann and Sher Ali and that, finally, a Russian Mission had reached the capital and Russian influence become all-powerful at the Ameer's Court, it was our duty, in the interests of our Indian Empire and for the maintenance of peace both within and without our borders, to supinely continue to pursue our policy of masterly inactivity, or to at once endeavour to counteract the intrigues, I will not say of our enemy, but certainly of our political rival, and to convince both her and the Ameer that, whilst most anxious to maintain friendly relations with Afghanistan and most unwilling to interfere in her internal affairs, we will brook no such interference on the part of a Power that has already declared the Ameer's territories to be beyond the sphere of her political action, and which consequently can only have entered the Afghan Kingdom with the view of making it either a screen behind which she might stealthily mature her plans for disquieting our frontier and spreading sedition amongst our subjects, or a cat's-paw by which she might effect her ends without running the risk of being called to account in the event of her machinations proving unsuccessful.

In a mere military point of view, no one can dispute the accuracy of the definition given by Sir Henry Norman of a scientific frontier, but it has to be considered :

1. Whether our present frontier answers to the definition.
2. Whether political considerations may not over-balance the purely military in deciding what is to be the future frontier of our Indian Empire.

General Norman rightly states that a good frontier is one that "would not entail the employment for its defence of an excessive force of troops, the occupation of which would not in other re-

spects be very costly ; the communications of which, along the whole line, and with the bases in rear, are fairly easy and not liable to interruption ; that it should, while in itself a strong bulwark, have in its front obstacles that would be very serious to an attacking force, and yet not such as to preclude blows being delivered to the front by the defenders."

Let us examine how far our present frontier accords with this description. It consists of a narrow tract of country about 500 miles in length, situated between a range of hills on the one side, and a broad and rapid river on the other, hence the force by which it is occupied can neither advance nor retreat ; in fact, not only does it not hold the glacis of the fortress, but it does not even occupy the bastions and ravelins ; so long as it is needed only for the defence of our territories against the attacks of mere predatory tribes occupying the hills, at the base of which the frontier line runs, possibly its great defect is of trifling importance, for the duty of our troops is confined almost entirely to the pursuit of raiders, who rarely wait to be attacked, but, as soon as they meet with serious opposition, hurriedly retire, in the hopes of escaping to their fastnesses with the booty they have captured—the desire for plunder being the sole inducement for their incursions ; but would this be the case in the event of India being seriously menaced with invasion by a large and well-disciplined force, augmented by a horde of irregular troops, instigated by the hopes of participating in the spoils of the rich cities in the plains, to become auxiliaries in the attempt.

As all the passes to our front would be closed against us, whilst our whole line would be threatened, it would be out of our power either to advance, in order to strike a counter-blow, and act upon the enemy's lines of communication, or to concentrate our troops upon any given point, in order to meet him on his debouching into the plains, at the same time with his base extending from Candahar to Cabul, and sheltered from observation behind the screen of mountains, the invader might quietly collect his supplies and make his preparations for attacking us upon what might appear our most unguarded point, his real attack being accompanied and concealed by feints directed upon other parts of our line, as the weak columns employed for this purpose when driven back, would simply retire upon strong positions in the hills, from which we should have difficulty in dislodging them, and from which they could always again advance, thus necessitating our retaining corps of observation in front of each of the three great passes—corps so far distant from one another, as to prevent their affording mutual support in case of attack, whilst, if one should be overpowered, the safety of the other two would become jeopardised, and they could only escape from their critical position by retiring across the Indus in the face of a pursuing enemy.

Under the above circumstances, so long as we do not command the passes, it can hardly, I think, be maintained that our position is such as to enable us to deliver counter-attacks in case of war, or calculated to secure our subjects from invasions from Afghans or others, whether incited to annoy us by Russia, or doing so of their own mere motion.

If, on the contrary, the passes were in our possession, then, indeed, our position would be comparatively strong. A few well-selected positions, carefully strengthened, would enable a small force to bar the passage of an army, whilst reinforcements could, when necessary, be furnished by the supporting columns located in the plains, and even although the out-posts might be eventually compelled to retreat, time would be gained and, at the same time, the hostile leader would be compelled, in some measure, to shew his hand, and thus from the nature of the several attacks, our commander would be able to form some idea as to the strength of the enemy and his probable plan of operations, and be able to judge of the direction in which his main body is moving and, consequently, of the point on which his decisive blow is intended to be struck.

It may be said that, by throwing our outposts too much in advance, they would be isolated from their supports, and their communications likely to be cut off, whilst, if constrained to retire, they would have to do so through a difficult country, in which they would be liable to be harassed by hostile tribes. Now this observation would apply almost exclusively to the force stationed at the further extremity of the Khyber Pass ; of course, I presume that some years must, in all probability, elapse ere any foreign power could be in a position to place in line a sufficiently large army as to absolutely imperil our north-west frontier, in the meanwhile, may we not fairly hope that in the Indian Army, men may arise who, cheered by the success that attended the efforts of the gallant and lamented Outram with the Bheels, may devote their energies to bringing under subjection some of the Hill tribes and, by a wise display of firmness, tempered with kindness, may succeed in controlling even the most lawless, and converting those who now form mere bands of robbers, into gallant and loyal defenders of our rule. Should this happy result be obtained, every mountain ridge between Dhaka and Jumrood would become an important position, which the assailants could only carry with great loss ; but even supposing the hope were not realised, and the tribes continued hostile, still the retreat need not prove difficult ; doubtless, the road-way between Dhaka and Ali Musjid will be much improved, the distance is but twenty-one miles, of which the last thirteen only would offer serious obstacles to the rapid movements of a retiring column ; but these obstacles would equally retard the advance of the pursuing enemy, the more especially, as the heights would be crowned by the skirmishers of the force, detached from the supports at the latter place, to cover the retreat. The defile narrows for the last three miles before reaching Ali Musjid, and

this portion of the Pass would naturally be sharply contested, whilst the whole of the main-body stationed in the neighbourhood of Jamrood could be brought into action in order to crush the enemy whilst still embarrassed in the defile, and unable to make effective use of his artillery.

In the Khurum Valley, the advance-post would be at the Peiwar Pass, and the supports at the Khurum fort and Thull, whilst, to the south, the advanced post would be in the neighbourhood of Quettah, or in the Pishin Valley, and the supports at Jacobabad Dherah, and Ghazi Khan; in neither case, apparently, would there be any difficulty in maintaining the requisite communications. In the first, the out-post would be connected with the fort by a valley, offering no impediments to a rapid advance; and, in the second, although the country through which the supports would have to pass is rugged, and the distances are great, the population is friendly.

At present, even in time of peace, in addition to the troops stationed in the Cis Indus districts of the Punjab, a large garrison is needed at Peshawur, and a special corps, consisting of (including the guides) six cavalry and twelve infantry regiments, with several batteries of artillery, is posted along the frontier, simply for the purpose of protecting our subjects from incursions from across the border, and, so long as our relations with the Hill tribes remain on their present footing, no reduction can be made in the strength of this force.

General Norman acknowledges that the occupation of the Khurum Valley would render our frontier near Thull more secure, but he objects to our holding Quettah and the Khyber Pass, principally upon the grounds that it would be necessary for this purpose to withdraw from the garrison of India a force which he estimates at not less than 7,000 or 8,000 men. Surely this demand is greatly over-estimated, when it is remembered that, in 1842, a garrison, entirely isolated, separated from our frontier not merely by a range of mountains, but by the entire breadth of the Punjab, without any European supports nearer than Kurnaul, a garrison consisting of one regiment of European infantry, one regiment of Native infantry, two squadrons of Native cavalry, a battery of artillery, and some Native sappers and miners, numbering of all arms, about 1,800 men, not only held the position of Jellalabad throughout the winter, but eventually inflicted a crushing defeat upon their assailants, capturing all their guns and camp-equipage, and compelling them to raise the siege; this, too, at a time when the whole of Afghanistan, elated by the annihilation of the Cabul garrison, had risen against us.

Under present circumstances, with a British cantonment at Peshawur and British posts at Ali Musjid and Dhaka, a force of the same strength would, in ordinary times, be sufficient to garrison Jellalabad, especially as there seems to be no reason to doubt

the possibility of our being able to raise from the Hill tribes, for the protection of our line of communication through the Khyber Pass, a body of militia, perfectly faithful so long as their pay may be regularly issued, and capable, under the control of a carefully selected commander, who would study their feelings and prejudices, of becoming an extremely valuable force, and the lever through which we might extend our influence generally throughout the border. With the Khyber Pass in our hands, the force in the Peshawur Division might, with possibly considerable advantage as regards the health of the British troops, furnish the necessary detail to form the Jellalabad garrison ; the duty of holding the Khurum Valley would be entrusted to the Punjab frontier force, whilst the addition of a wing of a European regiment to the force by which Quettah has recently been occupied, would be sufficient to render that post capable of resisting any unforeseen attack that might be made upon it.

The Shawl District, which is 5,500 feet above the sea, is stated to have a delightful climate, in the hottest season of the year (between June and August), the highest range of the thermometer being 80°, an agreeable contrast to that of Scinde, from which the wing might safely be withdrawn, whilst the men would benefit by their removal from a district in which, during five months in the year, the heat is excessive, often remaining at 100° throughout the night.

Under the disposition above specified, the establishment of the three advanced posts would prove no great drain upon our Army and, with the exception of the corps of Local Militia, of which the cost would not be excessive, need not entail any necessity for the addition of a single soldier.

Any scheme for occupying the ranges of hills stretching from Hazarah to Scinde and civilising the inhabitants by main force, might certainly be deemed visionary, and we must trust, as Sir H. Norman truly states, to time and such civilizing influences as we can bring to bear to tame and educate these wild people ; but it is a question whether occupying the advanced positions now proposed, we should not possess greater facilities for exerting our influence over them. This would be more particularly the case as regards the tribes in the neighbourhood of the Khyber Pass and Khurum Valley, upon whom the very fact of our holding posts in their rear would have a great moral effect.

The task of spreading the blessings of order and civilization amongst the fierce races to be found in the borderland is, doubtless, deserving of serious consideration—it is one involving great labour and responsibility, and can only be carried out gradually ; still it is not beyond the power of Great Britain, and, if successfully accomplished, must add materially to the safety and prosperity of our own provinces. Hitherto our efforts towards this end have been almost entirely confined to isolated acts of punishment

and repression, no systematic attempt has been made to bring them under our influence, and any such attempt would have been utterly fruitless and, indeed, out of place, so long as they were beyond the limits of our jurisdiction, and acknowledged nominal allegiance to another power, but once brought within our frontier line, means would not be wanting for the extension of our intercourse with them, and we might fairly anticipate that, in the course of a few years, such intercourse, if conducted under wise and strict supervision, might lead to happy results.

In his précis of the Art of War, General Jomini, in referring to lines of defence, states that all chains of mountains and all great defiles, protected by entrenchments upon their accessible points, can be regarded as defensive lines, at the same time, strategic and tactical, since they serve to suspend during several days the march of an enemy, and often oblige him to deviate from his direct march to seek a passage less difficult, in which case they prove an evident strategic advantage; but if the enemy attacks them in force to their front, then it is clear that they have also a tactical advantage, since it is always more difficult to attack an enemy in a post strong, both by nature and art, than to attack him in an open plain; and he points out how the small fort of Bard might have arrested the descent of the Army of Napoleon into the Valley of Aosta, and, equally, how a few good forts in the defiles of the Balkans might have frustrated the Russian plans in the campaign of 1829, remarking that, to concentrate forces in the plains, is a natural system, but, in a country with difficult gorges, it is to deliver the keys of the country into the hands of the enemy; whilst he describes a mountainous frontier as a defile difficult to pass, a temporary obstacle which, once conquered, presents an advantage rather than a danger to the army which has succeeded in seizing it. In fact, the obstacle once surmounted, and the war transferred to the plains, the chain of mountains may be considered as a species of base upon which an invader can always retire and find an available refuge.

All great military writers agree in condemning what is styled an inert or passive defence, and prefer the defence with returns to the offensive, styled by Jomini, the defensive offensive, which he asserts combines the advantages of the two systems. So long as our frontier is limited to the base of the mountains, instead of including the principal Passes, our action may be restricted to our own territories, as, naturally, the first act of an enemy would be, as I have already stated, to close the Passes against us, hence, in order to enable us to take the offensive, we must, in the first instance, carry them by assault, an operation likely to be attended with great loss, and which might not, if they were scientifically strengthened and defended by a resolute enemy, prove successful, so that, against our will, we might be compelled to act upon the purely defensive; in the present war the opposition met with in

the Passes has been comparatively feeble, but we have no right to calculate upon our obtaining possession of them on such easy terms in the event of a future campaign.

Taking all these facts into consideration, I think it can hardly be asserted, as a purely military question, that our present border-line offers us a good and scientific frontier.

With the Passes in our possession, the power of taking the initiative would rest in our own hands, and, supposing the enemy to have fairly established himself in Afghanistan, and this would be the first step to be accomplished preparatory to an invasion of India, whilst our own right flank would be, in a great measure, secured, we could push forward a force on Candahar so as to attack the extremity of his long line, 315 miles in extent, of which the right would rest upon that city, and which, with British posts at Jellalabad and the Peiwar Pass threatening his left he would possibly experience difficulty in re-inforcing, as he must either detach corps of observation to watch those posts and hold their garrisons in check, or else run the risk of having his communications with the capital exposed to attack. Instead, therefore, of having our frontier disquieted and the whole of India agitated, as would certainly be the case if we awaited attack in our own Provinces, we should become the assailants, and the contest would be transferred to the valley of the Turnuk. If success attended our arms it would, in all probability, prove decisive, whilst even if we were compelled to retreat, we should retire upon Quettah, where re-inforcements would await us, and enable us to arrest the enemy's progress. Meanwhile, peace and quietness would prevail throughout our own dominions and the mass of our subjects would be in no way affected, a matter of the greatest political importance.

The foregoing views are, however, based upon the hypothesis that a hostile Power had been permitted to occupy Afghanistan and become master of its resources and of its strongholds, but with Political or Consular Agents at Cabul, Candahar and Herat, and the Frontier Passes in our possession, there is little probability of any Foreign Power ever being permitted to take up such a position, for, not only ought our political influence to be paramount throughout the country, but by our being able to anticipate any hostile movement by an advance on Candahar, all hope on the part of Russia of carrying out to a successful issue any design for extending her dominions in that direction must cease; whilst, as she would feel assured that, so long as she contented herself with consolidating and improving the Asiatic Provinces at present under her rule and refrained from any interference, either open or secret, with a State which she should distinctly be informed is under our protection, and of which the limits should be clearly defined, so far from wishing to thwart her efforts we should view with satisfaction her attempt to bestow the advantages of good government

upon the races now under her control, the jealousy which has for so many years past existed between the two nations might gradually subside, and, by degrees, the relations of amity, which so long prevailed between them be restored.

Although, with reference to purely military considerations, the neighbourhood of Dhaka might, in some respect, be deemed the most suitable locality in which to establish our extreme frontier post beyond the Khyber, yet there are political advantages attendant upon our holding Jelallabad, which, upon the whole, would make that the more preferable station.

At Jelallabad, from our commanding position, we should enjoy an opportunity, through the adoption of a firm but conciliatory attitude, of bringing under our influence the Ghilzais, one of the most powerful of the Afghan tribes; we should be able to enter into communication with the Siah-posh Kafirs, a race which has, I believe, generally expressed themselves favourably inclined towards us; whilst, as suggested by me ten years ago, when pointing out the probable results of the policy then pursued, should in any treaty that may be concluded with the ruler of Afghanistan, a clause be introduced, under which he would receive a fixed liberal payment in lieu of all dues now levied upon our commerce and in return for a guarantee of protection to the lives and property of our merchants, Jelallabad might become a commercial *entrepôt*, from which the ramifications of our trade might be extended throughout Central Asia, a measure that would probably be more effectual towards conciliating the Afghan tribes and securing their good will than any diplomatic relations we might enter into with their ruler. Asiatic Princes are proverbially fickle, and owing to some fancied slight which he hopes to avenge, or to his cupidity being excited by some tempting offer from another Power, our ally of to-day may become our opponent to-morrow, but commercial intercourse once fairly established between two nations, the bonds by which they are united are not easily broken, and even a Sovereign may find himself powerless to engage his people in a war which they may feel to be opposed to their own interests.

Even in a mere military point of view, Jelallabad has some advantages as an outpost, the garrison would command the whole of the valley, from the resources of which, until it was dislodged, an enemy would therefore be excluded, whilst, before he could besiege the town or oblige the British force to evacuate it by threatening its line of communication, he would be compelled, after crossing the Tezeen Pass, at an elevation of 8,200 feet, to traverse upwards of 60 miles of most inhospitable and barren country by a road passing over long ranges of bleak hills, and through narrow and rugged defiles. If he employed a large force for the purpose he would experience considerable difficulty in carrying with him the requisite provisions, ammunition, &c., whilst if he

detached a small body there would be the risk of its being encountered and defeated as it debouched into the more open country, in the vicinity of Gundamuk.

Although during the last two or three years of Lord Napier's tenure of office in India, our political relations with the Ameer Shere Ali had become somewhat strained, and apparently, Russian diplomacy was gradually acquiring undue influence at Cabul, and taking possession of the ground which we ought to have occupied, yet there was still hope that the Ameer might be induced to recognise the advantages that would accrue both to himself and to his people from a cordial alliance with the only Power that could effectually interfere to prevent Afghanistan from becoming, in time, a Russian Province, hence no English statesman or soldier could then have advocated an advance of our frontier, or annexation of territory, that could only have been accomplished at the certain risk of alienating the ruler we were most desirous of retaining as our ally, but, with the appearance of the Russian Embassy at Cabul, and the refusal to receive the Mission under Sir Neville Chamberlain, the aspect of affairs completely changed, and the political question assumed an entirely new phase, it was clear that we must abandon all expectation of successfully pursuing a conciliatory policy towards the Ameer, and that, in the event of any rupture with Russia, his capital would become the scene of intrigues for inciting the border tribes to make forays into our districts, even if we should not find his regular forces arrayed against us. Hence, in self-defence, both for political and military reasons, with reference, first, to the effect that any invasion of our territories might have upon our subjects, amongst whom the slightest reverse on the Indus would, by clever intriguers, be magnified into an overwhelming disaster. Secondly, to the necessity for taking up a position which would admit of our assuming, if necessary, the offensive, and also enable us to oppose every possible obstacle to the advance of an enemy, we were compelled to occupy the three main Passes, and thus circumstances having placed in our hands the keys of the gates through which invading columns must pass, in the interests of the great dependency entrusted to our charge, and with the view of securing to its people a complete immunity from the evils caused by continually recurring rumours of foreign invasion, and preserving for them the full enjoyment of the blessings of peace, it is to be hoped that we shall never restore them to any chief upon whose fidelity we cannot fully depend; but for the future retain them in our own hands, and, although endeavouring to the utmost of our power, to cultivate friendly relations and to promote peaceful intercourse with our neighbours in Afghanistan, at the same time convince them that, whilst coveting no extension of territory and even fully prepared to afford them material aid and support in preserving their independence, we are strong enough

to hold our own and to maintain the integrity of our Indian Empire against all assailants.

With the Passes under our control, and our north-west frontier strengthened so as to effectually remove all alarm of any successful invasion from that quarter, by massing our troops upon important strategical points instead of dispersing them in small cantonments, at the same time re-organizing our Native Army, it might be possible to reduce our military expenditure without impairing our military power, and, after an almost unbroken era of forty years warfare, commencing from the appearance of a Russian Emissary at the Court of Dhost Mahomed, the Indian Government, with improved finances would be, at last, free to turn its undivided attention to the improvement of the moral and material condition of the vast populations under its rule, and by securing their welfare and happiness, prove Great Britain deserving of the trust reposed in her, and of the high position she now occupies on the roll of Nations.

ORFEUR CAVENAGH: General.

